

On Saturday, June 19, 2010, I made the following remarks at *A Call to Action*, a symposium on Haiti. The event was sponsored by the Palm Beach County Haitian Relief Coalition (PBC/HRC):

As the media's attention has now focused on other matters, it is more important than ever that people remember that while the cameras have turned away, the suffering in Haiti endures.

Lying just 600 miles from our shores, the small nation of Haiti has suffered through years of extreme poverty, political instability, and environmental destruction. This recent earthquake seems almost like a cruel joke.

But in the aftermath of the devastation, the U.S. and foreign governments, thousands of organizations, and countless individuals have contributed to the recovery and are committed to rebuilding a stronger Haiti.

In addition to the vital logistical support provided by the United States government and military, the U.S. has given over \$1 billion in humanitarian assistance to Haiti for the earthquake.

In Congress, we passed legislation to use our government's influence to encourage the forgiveness of Haiti's international debt.

We also passed legislation that incentivizes individuals to donate funds by allowing them to deduct contributions from last year's taxes, and we passed the Haiti Economic Lift Program to provide additional trade benefits to Haiti.

Additionally, the Haitian Private Sector Encouragement Act was introduced to spur private enterprise and economic development, as was the HELP Act to allow individuals with approved petitions for family-sponsored visas to come to the United States.

With as much as our government has done – and don't get me wrong, they should be doing more – this is a crisis that even the United States' government can't solve on its own.

The contributions of the United Nations, the international community, and non-governmental organizations have also certainly been vital to the recovery.

And yet, simply throwing money at Haiti is never going to solve its problems.

At the precarious time in which we find ourselves, it probably wouldn't even take a hurricane to undo much of the good work that has been done in the aftermath of the earthquake.

If we are ever going to pull Haiti out of this darkness, this recovery must be a coordinated and sustained effort. As the focus shifts from the immediate needs, we must focus on Haiti's long term development.

While supplying food is important, we must also invest in the agricultural sector and sustainable agricultural practices.

Similarly, with so many organizations providing much needed medical care, it is crucial that their services don't further cripple Haiti's struggling medical system.

And while a tarp is certainly better than being completely exposed to the elements, short-term, emergency shelter must not lead to years in tent cities.

Finally, as we work to build Haiti's physical and economic infrastructure, we can't forget that at the foundation of it all is an effective government.

Our assistance must supplement and not supplant the Government of Haiti. We cannot create

an eternally dependent state.

Haiti must be able to stand on its own when the aid organizations leave.

Now, it is not enough that we simply rebuild Haiti. Out of the death and destruction of this earthquake, we are presented with a unique opportunity to build from the ground up and right the mistakes of the past.

As decades of dependence on foreign aid have shown us, with the possibility to do good comes the very real possibility of waste, duplication, and inefficiencies in the rebuilding and recovery process.

It is for this reason that I have introduced a bill calling for a White House Conference on Haiti that will bring together all of the major stakeholders in the rebuilding, along with other interested parties, to share their knowledge and best practices and identify gaps in the recovery process.

It is my sincere hope that out of this Conference, opportunities for collaboration and coordination in projects big and small will emerge.

This symposium today is an important step in that direction. I applaud your commitment to helping Haiti, especially now that the suffering of the Haitian people is no longer front page news.

Now and as we become further and further removed from the earthquake is when it really counts. Keep fighting for the millions of Haitians who simply do not have a voice.

But just as Haiti cannot do it alone, I know that you and I can't either. Rebuilding Haiti should be a priority for the global community, but in particular for South Floridians.

Not only does Haiti lie just a stone's throw from our shores, but so many of us know of individuals who have been deeply impacted by this tragic event.

How can we turn our backs and do nothing? I urge you to keep pressing your friends, neighbors, and community leaders to help in your efforts.

And if pleas of compassion fall on deaf ears, we can always fall back on self-interest. Make it clear that helping our Haitian brothers and sisters is not only the right thing to do; it is also in their own best interest.

A more prosperous Haiti is a wealthier trading partner for the United States. In a more stable Haiti, fewer would decide to leave. And a better governed Haiti would lead to a reduction in drug trafficking throughout our hemisphere and a stronger ally for the United States.

The people of Haiti have endured enough. Now is the time to stand with them to build the flourishing, thriving nation that Haiti has all the potential to be.

Thank you, and I assure you that you have an ally in your efforts.